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ABSTRACT

In 1998, Trident Technical College conducted the 1997 Employer Follow-Up Survey to collect information from employers of 1997 graduates. A total of 373 employers of graduates were identified, of which 243 were contacted and interviewed. Findings indicate that employers rate graduates average or above average in most technical and personal skills. Suggestions for program improvements centered on adding technical skills and providing more experience. Nine data tables are presented. Public service (94%) and Allied Health (81%) had the highest response rates. The most frequent strength mentioned was knowledge/skills. The most frequent weaknesses mentioned were no experience and poor communication/interaction. Overall, technical skills were rated as average by 41 percent of respondents and above average by 57 percent. Personal skills were rated as average by 26 percent of respondents and above average by 71 percent. Ninety percent of graduates were ranked in the top half by employers compared to other employees in similar jobs. (RDG)

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at Trident Technical College

1997 Employer Follow-Up Survey Report

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INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

at Trident Technical College

1997 Employer Follow-Up Survey Report

Overview

Trident Technical College's (TTC's) Office of Institutional Research (IR) conducted the 1997 Employer Follow-Up Survey in March, April and May of 1998. The primary purpose of the survey was to collect information from employers of TTC's 1997 graduates to help the college evaluate and improve its instructional programs. The data are also used in accreditation studies and other reporting.

The 1997 Graduate Follow-Up Survey identified 373 employers of graduates employed in jobs related to their fields of study and obtained during attendance at TTC or after completion of their program. TTC faculty contacted and interviewed 243 of the 373 employers (a 65 percent response rate).

This report bases its data on respondents for all programs. All respondents did not answer all questions; consequently, the number of responses vary from question to question.

Results

Response Rate

The majority of respondents were employers of graduates with associate degrees. Table 1 presents the response rate according to type of award.

Table 1: Response Rate by Award

Type of Award	Number Surveyed	Number of Responses	Response Rate
Associate Degree	257	165	64%
Diploma	44	33	75%
Certificate	72	45	63%
Total	**373**	**243**	**65%**

The divisions with the highest rate of respondents were Public Service (94 percent) and Allied Health (81 percent). Table 2 presents response rates by division.

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Table 2: Response Rate by Division

Division	Number Surveyed	Number of Responses	Response Rate
Allied Health	99	80	81%
Arts & Sciences	48	23	48%
Business Technology	83	42	51%
Hospitality/Tourism	68	44	65%
Industrial/Engineering	15	6	40%
Nursing	44	33	75%
Public Service	16	15	94%
Total	373	243	65%

Individual summaries for programs with at least 2 respondents will be distributed to appropriate divisions.

Length of Employment

Employers reported that 125 graduates (52 percent) had worked at their present jobs between 7 and 12 months. Seventy-three (30 percent) had worked for 13 to 24 months, 26 (11 percent) 6 months or less and 17 (7 percent) more than two years.

Minimum Education Required

The survey asked employers to report on the minimum level of education required for the types of jobs for which they employed TTC graduates. Table 3 presents the minimum level of education required for all jobs surveyed.

Table 3: Minimum Education Required

Level of Education	Number	Percent
Two-year associate degree	102	44%
High school diploma	52	23%
One-year occupational program	44	19%
Two years college--no degree	16	7%
Less than high school diploma	8	3%
Four years or more of college	3	1%
Other	6	3%

Strengths of Graduates

The survey asked employers to identify up to three strengths graduates demonstrated when they first started working. IR categorized, tallied and ranked strengths according to frequency. Strengths specified by less than five percent of the respondents are classified as "Other." Table 4 presents a rank order of the strengths identified by employers.

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Table 4: Strengths of Graduates

Strengths	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Knowledge/skills	106	25%
Accuracy	58	14%
Willingness to learn	55	13%
People interaction	43	10%
Reliable	39	9%
Organized	20	5%
Other	97	24%
Total	418	100%

"Other" includes, caring attitude, confidence, eagerness, experience, maturity, motivation and professionalism.

Weaknesses of Graduates

The survey asked employers to identify up to three weakness graduates demonstrated when they first started working. IR categorized, tallied and ranked weaknesses according to frequency. Table 5 presents a rank order of these weaknesses identified by employers. Weaknesses specified by less than five percent of the respondents are classified as "Other."

Table 5: Weaknesses of Graduates

Weaknesses	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
No experience	37	19%
Poor communication/interaction	36	19%
Lack of skill	19	10%
Low self confidence	18	9%
Slow	13	7%
Lack of knowledge	12	6%
Unorganized	10	5%
Other	47	25%
Total	192	100%

"Other" includes weaknesses involving appearance, attendance, attitude, documentation, flexibility, following directions, maturity and perception.

Adequate Preparation for Job

Two hundred and twenty-four (97 percent) of the 230 employers who answered the question on job preparation said they felt the training at Trident adequately prepared graduates for their jobs. This percent has been at least 94 percent since 1990.

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Technical and Personal Skills

Employers rated graduates on 10 technical skills and 10 personal skills as compared to other workers with similar jobs. These ratings are listed in the tables below. Generally, employers rated graduates as "average" or "above average" in both types of skills. Table 6 presents the percents of below average, average, above average and the combined average ratings for technical skills.

Table 6: Technical Skills

Skills	Total Number	Percent Below Average	Percent Average	Percent Above Average	Combined Percent Average & Above
Job-related knowledge	238	1	43	56	99
Ability to operate job-related tools and equipment	237	1	41	58	99
Other job-related technical skills	229	1	48	51	99
Organizational skills	240	6	40	54	94
Communication skills	240	5	43	52	97
Math skills	191	2	55	43	98
Overall quality of work	240	1	33	66	99
Quality of work accomplished	240	4	39	57	96
Safety habits	224	2	33	65	98
Care of equipment	236	<1	33	67	100
Average of all ratings	232	2	41	57	98

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Table 7 presents the percents of below average, average, above average and the combined average ratings for personal skills.

Table 7: Personal Skills

Skills	Total Number	Percent Below Average	Percent Average	Percent Above Average	Combined Percent Average & Above
Attendance	241	4	21	75	96
Punctuality	241	3	20	77	97
Attitude toward job	241	2	23	75	98
Ability to follow instructions	241	3	26	71	97
Ability to work without supervision	239	6	33	61	94
Willingness to learn and improve	241	3	17	80	97
Ability to work well under pressure	240	6	38	56	94
Cooperation with fellow workers	239	2	25	73	98
Cooperation with management	240	<1	24	76	100
Personal appearance, dress	238	2	34	64	98
Average of all ratings	240	3	26	71	97

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Rankings of Work Performance

Employers ranked graduates' work performance in comparison with that of other employees in similar jobs. Ninety percent were ranked in the top half. Table 8 presents all rankings.

Table 8: Work Performance

Performance	Number	Percent
In lowest quarter	4	2%
In second quarter	18	8%
In third quarter	74	31%
In highest quarter	139	59%
Total	235	100%

Future Hiring and Recommendations

When asked if they would hire another Trident graduate for the same type of job if they had an opening, 229 employers (95 percent) said yes. Another 12 employers (5 percent) said they weren't sure, and 1 (less than 1 percent) said no. Of those who said they were unsure or would not employ another Trident graduate and gave a reason, nine (82 percent) stated that it would depend on the individual and 2 (18 percent) said graduates needed more experience.

As to recommending Trident graduates to others, 231 (95 percent) said they would do so, while 8 (3 percent) were unsure. Only one employer said he would not recommend a Trident graduate because this position was unique. Of the 6 employers saying they were unsure and gave a reason, all said it would depend on the individual.

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Comments on Improvements

In an open-ended question, the survey asked employers to suggest the most important things Trident could do to improve the graduates' skills, knowledge or attitudes. Each employer could specify up to three improvements. Improvements recommended in less than five percent of the responses are classified as "Other." Table 9 presents a rank order of the improvements recommended by employers.

Table 9: Employer Suggested Improvements

Improvements	Number	Percent
Better technical skills/knowledge	38	21%
Satisfied—no improvements needed	37	21%
More hands-on/clinical	36	20%
People skills/communication	25	14%
More realistic approach	8	5%
Other	35	19%
Total	179	100%

"Other" includes improvements in attitude toward work, management skills, people interaction, problem solving, professionalism and self-confidence.

Conclusions

- Employers continue to rate graduates above average or average in most of their technical and personal skills. These ratings have averaged 95 percent or above since 1990.
- Employers' suggestions on program improvements centered on adding technical skills and providing more experience.

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